

A

694.9.3.
11

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN THE

Parish Churches of ST. JAMES, CLERKENWELL,
and ST. GILES IN THE FIELDS,

On SUNDAY, JANUARY 23;

And of ST. ANDREW, HOLBOURN,

On SUNDAY, JANUARY 30, 1763.

By WILLIAM SELLO N,

Curate of ST. JAMES's, CLERKENWELL, Lecturer of ST. GILES's,
and Joint-Lecturer of ST. ANDREW's, HOLBOURN.

L O N D O N, Printed by J. HUGH S:

And sold by W. FLEXNEY, near *Gray's-Inn-Gate*, Holbourn.

M DCC LXIII.

Price SIX PENCE.

S. R. M. O. N.

John Campbell of St. John's, N. B.

And of St. John's, N. B.

WILLIAM S. L. O. N.

and John Campbell of St. John's, N. B.

LONDON: Printed by J. M. H. H. H.

MDCCCXXII

FOR THE EDITOR

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE following Sermon, on occasion of the severity of the season, and the generous collections for the relief of the poor, was delivered in the usual course of preaching, and without any further design: but the earnest request of several, to whom the Author's services are due, has prevailed over his own opinion of it, and engaged him to offer it to the Public.

ADVERTISEMENT

THE following Sermon, on occasion of the
seventy of the (centenar), and the generous
collections for the relief of the poor, was delivered
in the usual course of preaching, and without any
further design: but the earnest request of several
to whom the Author's services are due, has prevailed
over his own opinion of it, and engaged him to
offer it to the Public.

 PROV. XXX. 8, 9.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me : Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

THE words of the text point out to us the dangerous circumstances attending riches and superfluity on one hand, and want and poverty on the other; and plainly intimate, that the middle state of life, a state between the extremes of overflowing wealth and pressing necessity, is more safe and desirable, than either of them.—The reasonableness of preferring it to poverty will be readily acknowledged; for the inconveniences and difficulties of the latter are easily seen and dreaded at a distance. But that it should be preferred to riches, which command all the comforts and delights of life, will seem a great absurdity to the generality of mankind, who pronounce their judgment upon the first face of things, without any examination into their nature, or their consequences. An impartial consideration how-

ever of the powerful temptations arising both from abundance and from want, will prove to us the wisdom of Agur's choice, and shew the superior excellency of a middle state.

Pf. xlix. 20.

Such is the weakness of our nature, and such the deceitfulness of our hearts, that often 'man being in honour hath no understanding,' and being puffed up with prosperity is apt to forget himself and his duty. When the face of nature looks gay and smiles upon him; when he is surrounded with grateful objects, and every thing about him seems to promise the continuance of his happiness, a secret triumph and self-applause steal insensibly upon the mind: he conceives an undue opinion of his own merit and sufficiency; and vainly imagines himself secure against all the calamities of life.—This presumptuous confidence, which is the natural product of great affluence, chokes all the seeds of holiness; and, like the frost, prevents the cultivation and improvement of the soil. It counteracts all worthy affections, shuts up the heart against God, and renders it insensible to the duties of religion. It inclines him to forget the fountain, whence every gift and blessing is derived, and to be negligent of that Providence, which gives him all things richly to enjoy; to lose the sense of his dependence upon the protection and care of Heaven, and to withhold the acknowledgments of homage and worship due to his divine benefactor, upon whose mercy and goodness he exists.—What is this, but to deny God? It is to deny his supremacy and sovereignty; it is to deny our obligations and our obedience to him: and is expressive of the language in the text, 'Who is the Lord?'

Again,

Again, The charms and allurements of prosperity tend to captivate and bewitch the heart, and lead the man of affluence into immoderate pursuits of pleasure; they dissipate the vigour of the mind, betray the government of the superior powers and faculties; and raise the inferior appetites, which were ordained to be in subjection to reason, to possess the supremacy, and to be the sole guide and measure of his conduct. And when the due balance of the affections is broken, and the reins of reason are given up to passion, he is hurried into the gratification of every desire without control, and runs unrestrained in the way of his heart, and the sight of his eyes. Having the means in his own hand of supporting his folly, and the fashion of the world to countenance it, he indulges in all the blandishments of excess, and abandons himself to all the unmanly pleasures of a dissolute life.—From this depraved temper and habit of mind, which often grow out of a plentiful estate, it is an easy transition to irreligion and infidelity. For being taken captive by the soft delusion, and wholly dissolved in the delights and entertainments of sense, he endeavours to root out of his mind all regard to those troublesome principles, which give checks and interruptions to his vicious pursuits, and spoil the relish of his sensual enjoyments. He first entertains an aversion to those doctrines, which condemn his practices, and then raiseth doubts and difficulties concerning their authority. He becomes fond of every thing, that looks plausible on the side of infidelity, and catches up every little trifling objection against religion, which his passions and prejudices exceedingly magnify and exaggerate; till he at last throws off all restraint, and openly derides all goodness.—Thus from living as without God in the world, he wishes that

there was no such Being; and from wishing, he goes on, by degrees, to imagine that there is none; to deny his perfections, his providence, his existence: that, by deposing him from the throne of Heaven, and banishing him out of the universe, he may justify himself in his impiety, and follow freely the bent of his licentious inclinations.

On the other hand, consider the dangers and temptations attending a state of poverty; and even in a religious and moral view, without respecting its immediate and temporal disadvantages, it must appear to be an unhappy situation of life.

Extreme poverty is a great temptation to impatience and discontent, and murmuring and complaining against the high disposer of all things. It raises suspicious and uneasy reflections concerning the administration of Providence, and insinuates notions which derogate from the divine justice and impartiality. Many wise and good men, upon having been reduced from high and flourishing circumstances to adversity and distress, have laboured under great perplexity concerning the moral government of God, and been tempted to doubt of the reality and advantage of religion. With a vain confidence of this effect, Satan is represented as soliciting the Almighty to try Job in the furnace of affliction, and pleading thus against him; ‘Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath; and he will curse thee to thy face.’ And we may observe, that his first temptation of our Saviour was founded upon bodily and temporal wants: when he was an hungred, the tempter came unto him.

Job. i. 11.

But

But the crimes, to which indigent circumstances are here described, as peculiarly subjecting and exposing men, are Theft, and taking the name of God in vain.

Such is the constitution of things, and the condition of human life, established by the wise Creator of the world, that the ends of society could not be answered and maintained without a variety of circumstances and a distinction of property : and therefore he hath ordained laws for the security of every one's separate interest against all attempts of violence and fraud ; and every civil government hath constantly the same design in view, and studies to protect its members in the peaceable enjoyment of their private rights. Yet when persons, into whose minds no principles of religion, no sentiments of wisdom and piety have been instilled ; when such, either thro' the extravagance of their lives, or through the dispensations of Providence, are deprived of the conveniences and necessities of life, and on looking to the right hand, and to the left, can see nothing but a variety of wretchedness ; in the conflict of distracting passions, which such a situation occasioneth, an undue desire of their neighbour's property insinuates itself into the mind, and suggests powerful temptations to transgress the bounds of justice. The immediate necessity urgeth them to comply, drawing away the heart from an attention to the certain, though distant, consequences of such compliance, and warping the judgment from distinguishing nicely between right and wrong. And the imagination becomes exceeding fruitful in inventing specious pretences to palliate and gild over any little deviations from the rules of strict honesty, and in forming designs and projects to acquire the desired object

object by the violation of right. And hence they proceed to seek a maintenance by any fraudulent and irregular practices, and are led by little and little to all imaginable degrees of injustice.

By the other temptation of poverty, mentioned in the text, 'the taking the name of God in vain,' does not seem to be intended, that indecent as well as impious custom of profane swearing in common conversation. In justification or excuse of which no plea can be pretended; and which can be no otherwise accounted for, than from mere habit. For there is no engaging allurements in the vice itself, nor any propensity or temptation to it in the human constitution; on the contrary, the sacred name of God naturally strikes the mind with awe and reverence. And that there is no immediate tendency or inducement to it arising from indigent circumstances, is very evident, because the practice of it is not confined to the lowest class and order of men, but is almost equally prevalent among persons of exalted and affluent condition, to the great dishonour of themselves and their religion, in contempt of the authority of the laws, and in defiance of the power of the Almighty.

But the words before us mean Perjury; that irreligious and most presumptuous degree of taking the name of God in vain; when a man deliberately invokes Him as a witness to the truth of that, which he knows to be false; and makes a solemn appeal to the Most High, in order to deceive and wrong his neighbour. 'Left I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain;' that is, lest the bitterness of want

want should tempt me first into fraud and indirect practices for support, and afterwards into perjury to free myself from the accusation. When a man has yielded to one sin, it is not easy to resist the next; and if an *Oath* may be ‘the end of all strife,’ Heb. vi. 16. and clear him from all suspicion, he that hath been so far guilty as to steal, will be under strong temptations to swear falsely. When he stands in danger of perpetual shame and infamy, of public disgrace and punishment; when there is this only hope of escape, or of evading the power of the laws; will not the same springs of action, which before influenced him to provide for his safety by injuring his neighbour, excite him also to shun the present danger by any new expedient? When the barriers of modesty and conscience are broken down, when he has despised the authority of the law-giver, and been guilty of a direct contempt of God, by acts of unrighteousness; what will restrain him from offending with his tongue, and ‘taking the name of his God in vain? So that the connection between these two vices appears easy and unobstructed; and it is indeed unhappily confirmed by too many instances in life, where theft has introduced perjury; and thus the temptations of poverty have prevailed upon weak men to add sin to sin, and heap one wickedness upon another.

From such considerations of the difficulties of each state, and from a sense of the frailty of human nature, how apt it is to betray us into the snares of the one kind or the other; Agur prays to God, that he may be delivered from the dangers of either extreme, and be favoured with such a moderate competency of fortune, as may supply the conveniences
of

of life, and effectually preserve him from every destructive way.

The man in a middle state of life dwells in undisturbed ease and happiness, not liable to the agitations and perplexities of the rich or poor. For, while some, who are crowned with honour, and overabound with wealth, are endangered by the assaults of malice and the underminings of envy ; and others, who are born to no inheritance but poverty and trouble, can hardly earn the necessaries of life with the sweat of their brow, and suffer the spurns and insults of those, who have no softenings of humanity in them ; he is not exposed either to contempt on one hand, or to envy on the other : but, being not so high as to provoke any malicious designs against him, nor so low as to be trodden down and despised, he sitteth safely under his own vine and his fig-tree, and there is none to make him afraid.

Again, He is exempt from that bodily labour and fatigue, which wearies out nature and shortens the days of man ; and does not experience that indolence and stagnation, which renders even the greatest blessings of life, flat and insipid. He suffers not either the real wants of the poor, or the imaginary wants of the rich ; and is not troubled with the cravings of importunate hunger, or the squeamish delicacy of a depraved appetite. But equally free from the pinching pains of abstinence and fasting, and from the enticements of high-seasoned dainties and luxurious entertainments, he enjoys that simplicity of food, which promotes at the same time health of body and cheerfulness of mind.

And

And further, He has peculiar advantages with respect to the knowledge and practice of virtue: for he escapes the many trials and temptations, which arise from narrow or plentiful circumstances of fortune, and which are so equally powerful, that it has been thought difficult to determine, on which side the greatest danger lies: and being removed from the cares and incumbrances of the opulent and exalted, and from the necessary labour which employeth the poor and indigent, he is blessed with more opportunities, than either of them, to step aside from public life, from the hurry of the world, and the allurements of sense; to examine and improve his mind; to enable him for the better discharge of his duty, and the pursuit of higher degrees of goodness and perfection.

What then? Shall people, oppressed with necessity, yield to the temptations of their condition, and seek refuge in the practice of unrighteousness? And are the rich absolutely in a dreadful condition with regard to a future life?—No; this inference cannot be allowed; for notwithstanding what has been discoursed, each state may be directed and improved to the highest benefit and advantage.—The very same objects, by which we are tempted to pride, sensuality, and a forgetfulness and denial of God; by different exercises and dispositions of mind, may be the occasions of goodness, and the means of true happiness. And those unhappy circumstances of life, by which we are tempted to the violation of justice for support, may be converted into real blessings, and be more than compensated by the good resulting from them; they may produce a plentiful harvest of genuine virtue, and prove

James i. 4.

an opportunity of our growing in self-dominion, patience, and holiness, and ‘ make us perfect and intire, wanting nothing.’ Many there are, who despise the allurements of riches; or who rise superior to the difficulties of want. Many, surrounded with worldly ease and plenty, are humble and devout; or, pressed with the galling yoke of poverty, industrious and honest.—Many esteem their treasures, as the instruments of charity and beneficence, of promoting the interest of religion, and of doing those ‘ good works, which are profitable to men:’ and many, under the clouds of adversity, shine out eminent examples of steadfast integrity and resignation to the will of God.

Tit. iii. 8.

It becomes us therefore, to watch over our sentiments and conduct; and (as our gracious heavenly Father hath dispensed to us a variety of gifts, and appointed different states and circumstances in the world, for the benefit of society, and in order to the exercise of different virtues) to consider the peculiar duties of that condition, in which Providence hath placed us, and to fulfil the law of our creation, in making a proper improvement of our powers and capacities; to fortify our minds with such a seasonable provision of wisdom and piety, as may enable us to maintain an uniform tenour of spirit in all events which may befall us, and to defend ourselves against the malicious efforts and subtle devices of the enemies of our salvation: to keep a careful guard over our senses, appetites, and passions, and deny the love of ease and aversion to labour, and every inclination, which may hinder our progress in the attainment of virtue and happiness. So shall we act a rational consistent part,
and.

and verify our profession of Christianity by our practice of it; we shall preserve our integrity and peace of mind amidst the most dangerous temptations, and have the assured hopes of future felicity in the enjoyment of the Divine Favour.

Let those, who labour under very hard and difficult circumstances, shew a proper disposition of humility; not murmuring, nor unthankful towards God; and endeavour to make a true use of those afflictions, which His hand, mercifully severe, hath been pleased to lay upon them. Let them recollect, that riches, though not in themselves criminal, are attended with a variety of danger: that they have corrupted the hearts of many, who have been thought happy in the enjoyment of them: and that perhaps they might have the same effect upon them, and cause them to languish and be miserable, even in the midst of abundance. For who can be certain of preserving that meekness and lowliness in a state of riches, which the school of poverty hath taught him? Who can assure himself, that a high exaltation of fortune would not overcome the present moderation of his temper, and betray him into an unbecoming triumph of heart, and an undutiful behaviour towards God? What security hath any one, that upon being surrounded with undisturbed enjoyments, and solicited on all sides by the enticements of luxury and excess, he should not be overpowered through the prevalence of temptations, and fall a prey to those snares of pleasure, to which thousands and ten thousands have fell before him?—That strength and fortitude of mind, which may bear the hardships of necessity, might languish away with the fulness of plenty; and the ease and indulgence

of prosperity might cherish and give life to those seeds of vice, which may be suppressed and deadened by the severe season of adversity.

And as persons, under the perplexities and embarrassments of poverty, are exposed to the peculiar temptation of fraud and indirect arts for subsistence, let them be always jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy; always upon their guard against the first beginnings of declension from the paths of virtue, the least introductory acts of injustice, which the heart is apt to be betrayed into, under the foolish pretence of their being but small sins, and of no great importance. For such, if indulged, may insensibly lead them on to greater excesses, and carry them at length into the most enormous and capital offences. Let them arm themselves with courage to encounter the buffetings of adverse fortune, and resist the most vehement sollicitation to wickedness; willing rather to continue under the pressure of affliction, than to relieve themselves by unwarrantable means, or gain a support by unrighteous and unlawful methods: rather to suffer any thing, to endure any pain, disgrace and misery, than violate their conscience, and do that which is evil: expressing themselves in the same resolved manner, as Job did, when sunk into the lowest condition of humanity; ‘While I live, will I not remove mine integrity from me:’ and according to the advice of St. Peter, ‘committing the keeping of their souls to God in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.’—Thus, though the body may suffer, the mind will be preserved from the perplexities and stings of guilt: though the external state of things may be bitter and grievous to be borne, yet all things will

Job xxvii. 5.

1 Ep. iv. 19.

will be right in their own breasts. The consciousness of innocence and integrity will support them under the deepest distress, the most dismal conjuncture of afflictive circumstances; and be a spring of tranquillity and joy, utterly independent of the world, and far excelling all the pleasures of voluptuousness, ambition, or avarice.

And let those, who have riches, possess them with sobriety, moderation, and temperance; not setting their affections upon them, nor making them the objects of their trust and confidence; but suppressing all fond thoughts of their own perfection, merit, and sufficiency, and remembering that they necessarily depend upon the protection of Providence, as much as the most miserable creature upon earth. Let them not trifle away the superfluities of their wealth in pomp and ostentation, and abuse them to the purposes of luxury; but consider that they are committed to them as stewards for the trial of their fidelity, and be rich in good works as well as in possessions. Let them reflect upon the temptations and difficulties, to which the poor are exposed, and be excited to commiserate their case, and communicate relief and comfort to them; that they may lighten their burden, and rescue them from that extremity which is apt to precipitate them into the most desperate attempts:—and more especially in this severe season, when the wants of old and young; the miseries of those who are just going out of life, and of those who are just entered into it; the distresses of the labourer and artificer, of the widow and the orphan, of the infirm and the diseased, call loudly upon us for assistance, and cannot be satisfied by
 sooth-

soothing words and wishes without solid acts of beneficence.

Should ye enter into the miserable abodes, the dismal habitations, where poverty has taken possession, like an armed man, and holds an absolute dominion; and behold the helpless children, cold, and destitute of clothing; hungry and crying for bread, with their hearts fainting within them; on one side the afflicted mother, nursing a tender infant, which strives in vain to draw nourishment from the empty breast; and on the other, the honest sympathizing father, lamenting over his family, which the inclemency of the weather has deprived of the benefits of his labour?—Should ye be introduced to such a pitiable sight, what would be the working of your hearts? Should ye not melt at the calamities of your fellow-creatures; and bear a part in the sighs and complaints of the afflicted? Would not the tear of commiseration fall from the eye, and the hand be stretched out for their relief? Should ye not experience, that in relieving them, ye should also relieve yourselves, and that in reality ‘it is more blessed to give, than to receive?’—But the miseries of the poor have been already felt, and in a great measure relieved; the sense of them hath affected deeply the minds of the good and pious, and hath opened the hearts and the hands of the merciful. The spring of charity, which before flowed among us with no little current, hath seasonably enlarged itself, and is become like the Psalmist’s river of God, diffusing its streams throughout the land, and carrying plenty and gladness along with it. And your late generous and chearful contribution, to provide the

the necessaries of life for the distressed inhabitants of the parish, fully manifests that benevolence, which is the refuge of the miserable, and the support of the disconsolate; and evidences your satisfaction and delight in the exercise of the kind and social affections.

There is indeed such an inward satisfaction, such a real and substantial pleasure, in doing good and imparting comfort to the needy, as is not to be described. What a joy is it, to be the instruments of comforting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction; of ministering clothing to the naked, and bread to the hungry; or communicating any other supply to those who are in need! Such genuine fruits of love are a lasting spring of pleasure; to be enjoyed through every state of our existence: while the gratifications of sense perish with the using, and yield no comfortable reflection; these will bear a review, with the highest self-approbation, and pour balm into the breast in the time of pain and calamity. To these Job recur'd under the most severe trials, and with the remembrance of them spoke comfort to his mind. 'I delivered the poor that cried, says he, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.'

Go on therefore, my brethren, and be not weary in well-doing: improve the talents with which Providence hath intrusted you, diligently and faithfully; and increase your liberality, in proportion as the necessities of mankind may increase:

crease: so shall ye receive in this present world an hundred-fold recompence in the approbation of your own consciences, and in the world to come an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

THE END.